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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, December 25, 1939.
(Christmas)

(For Broadcast Use Only)

Subject: "VALUES IN RURAL LIFE." Information from M. L. Wilson, Undersecretary of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and O. E. Baker, Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

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Merry Christmas to you, one and all! I hope it's been a real, old-fashioned family Christmas, with all the children and the grandchildren there, and cousins and aunts and uncles, too,- a big happy gathering of the clan. It doesn't matter much what you got, or what you gave, except in so far as you gave generously of that spirit of family solidarity which Christmas arouses in most of us.

If your home is in a rural district it is likely that this sense of family unity is very strong, and that's a fine thing. And because Christmas Day is an especially appropriate time to think about our family group, I'm bringing you today some of the ideas of two well-known leaders of agricultural thought, both in the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

One is Dr. O. E. Baker, of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Dr. Baker is an economist, and he could tell you some interesting things about the population trends in the United States in the next decade or so. He also expresses his conviction that at its best, rural life presents splendid chances of happiness and deep satisfactions in living; that one reason for this is because rural life is run largely on what economists call the "familistic" pattern. That means, a system based on love of the land and family loyalty.

It used to be true that the farm family was nearly self-sufficient. Most of its necessities could be raised at home or bartered for goods or services needed from sources outside the home. Unfortunately our complex modern way of life has changed this pattern, and many influences have combined to make rural life less

secure and simple than it used to be. But Dr. Baker believes that the values in rural life are still the same, that rural people have always made an important contribution to our national welfare, and that they can make an even greater contribution in the future, provided they can recover the ownership of the land and faith in themselves.

And so Dr. Baker believes that the "familistic" economic system should be strengthened. He says, "Agriculture seems to be the only major occupation characterized by the persistence of a dependence on the family. Present trends indicate that in some way more families must be raised in a rural environment where conditions are more favorable to family life than in our large cities. This may not require that the primary occupation of the family head should be farming." By this Dr. Baker means that some money income may be earned in a city or industrial job, but that much of the food can be raised at home, lessening cash food costs and releasing cash for other needs. This is the same idea the extension services of the various states have been stressing.

The rural environment has many advantages for growing children, besides an abundance of home-raised food. (I'm still presenting Dr. Baker's thoughts.) The rural child learns within the farm home to do many of the things which are no longer done in city homes. The farm home transmits skills and culture from one generation to another. Members of the family work together- fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. Amusements tend to be those in which people take part, instead of being those for which they are passive spectators. There is a unity of objective for the whole family, such as we see so strongly expressed at Christmas.

Modern science has given farm communities and town folks closer contact with each other, and modern education is constantly reaching out to serve agricultural areas more effectively. Another agricultural thinker, M. L. Wilson, Undersecretary of Agriculture, says these changes are bringing many advantages to rural people, but that at the same time, the older kind of self-sufficient folk-lore farm culture had



virtues that ought to be preserved. It had qualities that are distinct from the patterns of living we see in city surroundings. Let me quote from Mr. Wilson's picture of this earlier rural life. Then in your own family group around the Christmas fire, you may like to discuss the values he points out and see which ones your group has retained:

"The farm was not a business run for a profit, but a home, and a settled family enterprise in which all hands shared tasks and responsibilities in order jointly to make a living from nature. This circumstance provided economic security. It didn't matter so much what the outer world did, for most of the necessities of life were produced on the farm. There was old-age security. A pair of grandparents was usually in the farm home. It would have been a family disgrace for them not to be there.

"There was social stability. Within the family there was the understanding that can come only from being partners in a common enterprise. Within the community there was the likeness that develops among settled folk pursuing like ends. There was much neighborliness, and opportunity for rich friendship.....Early marriage was economically possible. Social gatherings such as husking bees, quilting parties, and sewing bees were amusements built out of neighborly needs. The rural church was a social center as much as a house of religion.....

"By reason of the fact that he made for himself or grew for himself most of the things that he needed, the self-sufficing farmer was not conditioned to the idea of getting something for nothing. What you got was the result of your own industry and competence, and of the favor that heaven and the natural world bestowed. Production, and not wirepulling, combat, speculation, or manipulation, was the key to material welfare."

Mr. Wilson points out the elements that have changed this picture, and while sure that many of these sturdy older values are worth retaining, he says that country living is not as picturesque and simple as many writers would have us believe. Successful modern farming is based on science as well as hard work, but it is still a worth while way of life. And it centers, as Dr. Baker also believes, on a strong family spirit. That is the Christmas thought I leave with you today.

